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MEMORIAL EXHIBITION

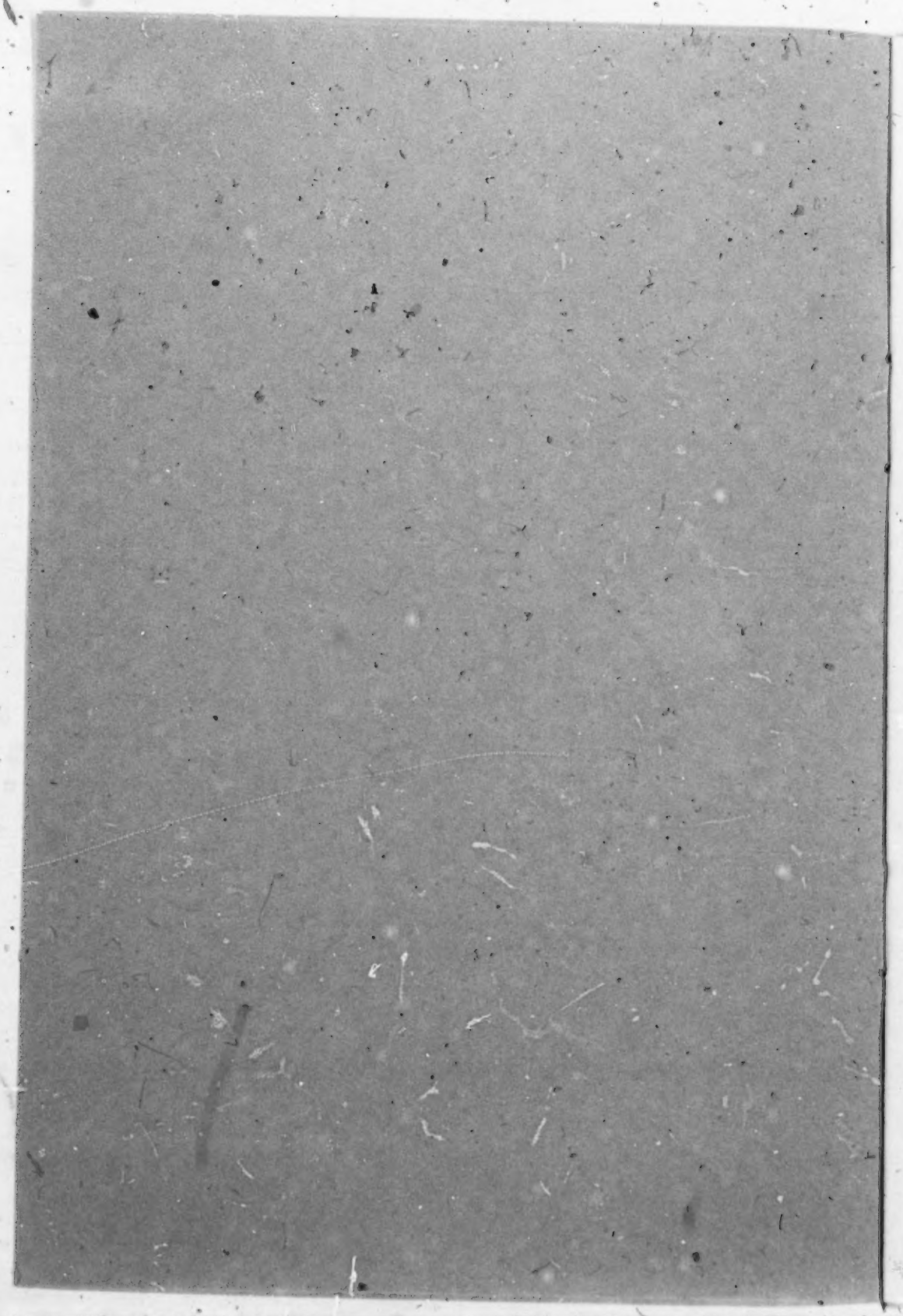
OF THE WORKS OF

Ethel Walker

1861-1951

THE ARTS COUNCIL

1952



FOREWORD

This collection was shown at the Tate Gallery in May of this year, where it formed part of a larger exhibition, organised jointly by the Tate Gallery and the Arts Council, to commemorate Ethel Walker and two other distinguished women artists—Gwen John and Frances Hodgkins.

The Council is greatly indebted to all the owners who have lent their pictures so generously, and in particular to the Executors of Dame Ethel Walker. Their thanks are also due to Mr T. W. Earp for his sympathetic introduction to the catalogue.

PHILIP JAMES

ETHEL WALKER

(1861—1951)

T. W. EARP

A SPECIAL KIND of brightness has been missing from the London galleries since Ethel Walker's death in March last year. A faithful exhibitor at the shows of the many art societies which claimed her as a member, she had for long announced her presence by works whose unwavering consistency of manner was at once recognisable as hers, and which, serenely independent of their neighbours on the walls, shone with the light of their creator's mind as well as of their colour. Whether it was a girl's portrait, or a stretch of coast where the eye was led to a distance of unresting sea, or a radiant flower-piece, the variety of her subjects—for Ethel Walker had an old-masterly fullness of range—was drawn to unity by the ruling factor of self-expression in their treatment.

It was to be expected that painting which bore so evidently the imprint of individual impulse sprang from a compelling early vocation; but in her youth Ethel Walker, who was born in Edinburgh on June 9th, 1861, felt no attraction to an artist's career. She was, indeed, taught drawing and painting in water-colours as necessary accomplishments of a young lady of the time, only to entertain a disinclination to the theory of slavish imitation then prevalent. Not until she was in her twenties did she make the deliberate choice to become a painter, after visiting in Edinburgh a private collection of oriental art, an experience whose force of revelation remained potent with her to the end. It was the Chinese paintings which impressed her most, and their influence, when she was firmly set on her own way, was not displaced by that of the European masters with whose achievement she had in the meantime made acquaintance. It should be noted, too, as bearing at any rate upon the spirit of her work, that she later read deeply in Taoist philosophy.

Having decided on a painter's profession, she went for two years as a student to the Ridley School, and then, at the Westminster and Slade Schools, became a pupil of Professor Frederick Brown, who guided so many eminent artists upon their early path, and

who, during his long tenure of office there, made the Slade famous as a school of fine draughtsmanship. Brown perceived high promise in Ethel Walker, who used to say that she owed everything to him and to Walter Sickert, at whose evening classes she also studied, while other enthusiasms of her first working years in London were Whistler and Wilson Steer. She returned from a visit to Madrid full of admiration for Velazquez; of later masters, a Manet exhibition in Paris won her adherence to that artist before his merit had ceased to be a matter of dispute, and the luminous properties of her own work owe something to his example.

From the start, her drawing was marked by the swift decision of its line, its freedom of gesture tempered with a taut resilience; but in painting she did not immediately reach what is now regarded as her characteristic manner. Her early work comprises many interiors with figures, Rembrandtesque in the dark richness of their tones and very reminiscent of Professor Brown's own painting. They are charmingly illustrative of their period, grave in key, and carefully carried out, yet they lack the individual invention that followed her adoption of impressionism.

This was heralded by a series of large decorative works, of a kind to which she returned at intervals throughout her career and represented in the Sculpture Gallery at the Tate Gallery by *Nausicaa*, *The Zone of Love* and *The Zone of Hate*. Dream-like in their realisation of the subject, indeterminate in time and place, they are tinged with a suggestion of orientalism even when dealing with a Homeric theme. They are exquisitely evocative of a classic Golden Age and of the myths of the East, in which Ethel Walker was deeply interested. In treatment, as in interpretation, nothing could be farther from the academic 'reconstructions' of a Leighton or a Poynter, which were still a popular vogue. A new kind of vision was in play, a new visual poetry was captured, in these large, flowing compositions whose grace of line made so sensitive a mould for the artist's thought, while the deceptive ease of her construction yet revealed a controlled harmony of form. With an appreciation of this side of her art goes the regret that Ethel Walker never had the opportunities afforded by the state to Delacroix and Puvis de Chavannes in France, of developing a gift for decorative fresco to its widest scope.

In 1900 she was elected a member of the New English Art Club

after the portrait *Angela* (no. 3) had appeared in its exhibition, and impressionism, whose cause had not then been entirely won in this country and whose establishment here it was the Club's major aim to foster, gained her increasing sympathy until she became one of the foremost English exponents of the movement. And although in technique her impressionism was less doctrinaire and scientific than that of the French masters—nearer to Whistler than to Monet—with less use of divided colour and for the most part content with a broad daylight effect, she gained the same result of vibrance and spontaneity. This shows particularly in her portraits of women, usually painted in one dominant key of radiant colour, which, without effort at deliberate likeness, net the sense of personality in their rapid grasp of a moment's mood, as in *The Mauve Dress* (no. 7) or *Girl in a Blue Dress* (no. 31). Her portraits of men are happily characterful, but admit of less exercise of the qualities which give her feminine portraiture its charm. She painted women, indeed, as though they were flowers; for her flower-pieces, cascading in the brilliance of their tints, also convey, in their lyricism and eager directness of execution, the enthusiasm of the painter's response to her subject. With no stiffness of arrangement, she luxuriated in nature's colourful abundance.

Nature on a more expanded scale she treated in the landscapes and sea-pieces mostly painted in the neighbourhood of Robin Hood's Bay, between which locality and Chelsea she spent the greater part of her working life. *Robin Hood's Bay in Winter* (no. 21), with its distinct tang of weather, well displays her mastery of atmospheric effect. Overriding unnecessary detail, in an impressionism, like Whistler's, of synthesis rather than analysis, with quick notation she drives to the essentials of her scene, drawing out the spirit wrapt in the appearance. Yet her originality in this section of her work is most shown in the marines like *Seascape* (no. 17) and *Sea Piece* (no. 32), with little more to their theme than a far emptiness of water, and yet filled with movement and life. These paintings of the sea, whose calm or surge, uncharged with any emphasis of convention, suffice in themselves to make the picture, owe their appeal to the rhythmic vitality which, as Ethel Walker's studies must have disclosed to her, was the first of the Six Canons of traditional Chinese painting. All her work, indeed, proclaims her perception of a rhythm of the spirit animating

visible reality, and if sometimes it seems a little hurried or incomplete, it was because the ardour of its proclamation was too urgent to be gainsaid. In her later years, the desire to enlarge yet further her means of expression led her to study sculpture under Professor Havard Thomas. She produced a number of bronze figures, graceful in their deft modelling and of rare plastic quality.

She was created C.B.E. in 1938 and D.B.E. in 1943, and was elected A.R.A. in 1940. Besides the New English Art Club, she was a member also of the Royal Society of British Artists, the Royal Society of Portrait Painters, the Society of Women Artists, the Society of Mural Painters, and the London Group. She died on March 2nd, 1951.

CATALOGUE

All measurements are given in inches

Paintings

1. *By the River*, 1898
   Oil, 23½ x 19½
   LENT BY MISS CELIA BRAMWELL

2. *The Artist's Stepmother, Mrs Arthur Walker*, *c.* 1899
   Oil, 44 x 34
   LENT BY THE TATE GALLERY

3. *Angela*, 1899; *Plate I*
   Oil, 28 x 21
   LENT BY MISS OLIVIA WALKER

4. *The Hon. Mrs Adams*
   Oil, 35 x 27
   LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

5. *At Abba Fifty Years Ago*
   Oil, 40 x 31
   LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

6. *Portrait of a Woman With a Fringe*, *c.* 1930
   Oil, 28½ x 22¼
   LENT BY SIR JOHN ROTHENSTEIN, C.B.E.

7. *The Mauve Dress*, *c.* 1930; *Plate IV*
   Oil, 27 x 35
   LENT BY MARIAN KRATOCHWIL, ESQ.

8. *Self-Portrait*, *c.* 1931
   Oil, 25 x 30¼
   LENT BY THE TATE GALLERY

1 ANGELA (No 3) *Miss Olivia Walker*

11 INVOCATION (No 26) *The Executors of the late Dame Ethel Walker*

III RECLINING NUDE No 9) *Mrs C. W. Aschan*

iv THE MAUVE DRESS (No 7) *Marian Kratochwil, Esq.*

9. *Reclining Nude*, c. 1935-6; *Plate III*
Oil, 40 x 24
LENT BY MRS C. W. ASCHAN

10. *A Spanish Gesture*, 1934
Oil, 40 x 29
LENT BY THE WALKER ART GALLERY, LIVERPOOL

11. *The Miniature*, 1936
Oil, 43¼ x 24¼
LENT BY THE BRIGHTON ART GALLERY

12. *Vanessa*, 1937
Oil, 24 x 20
LENT BY THE TATE GALLERY

13. *Flower Piece*, 1941
Oil, 29 x 24
LENT BY MRS ERNEST SANDER

14. *Miss Havard Thomas*
Oil, 24 x 20
LENT BY EDWARD LE BAS, ESQ., A.R.A.

15. *Seascape: The Coming Storm*
Oil, 24 x 36
LENT BY THE ASHMOLEAN MUSEUM, OXFORD

16. *The Toilette*
Oil, 36 x 28
LENT BY THE REV. ARTHUR BATEMAN

17. *Seascape*
Oil, 20 x 24
LENT BY THE WALKER ART GALLERY, LIVERPOOL

18. *Miss Josephine Sykes*
Oil, 25¾ x 20½
LENT BY THE WETHERED FAMILY

19. *Reverie*
Oil, 13⅞ x 10½
LENT BY THE WETHERED FAMILY

20. *Still Life, Fruit and Flowers*
Oil, 24½ x 29½
LENT BY AUGUSTUS JOHN, ESQ., O.M., R.A.

21. *Robin Hood's Bay in Winter*
Oil, 25 x 30
LENT BY THE CITY OF YORK ART GALLERY

22. *Contre Jour*
Oil, 29½ x 24½
LENT BY MRS DONALD MCLACHLAN

23. *Portrait of a Young Girl*
Oil, 19½ x 23½
LENT BY H. A. UPTON, ESQ.

24. *John Tweed, Sculptor*
Oil, 19½ x 23½
LENT BY H. A. UPTON, ESQ.

25. *Sea Piece*
Oil, 24½ x 35½
LENT BY SIR GERALD KELLY, P.R.A., AND LADY KELLY

26. *Invocation; Plate II*
Oil, 65 x 41
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

27. *Contre Jour*
Oil, 49½ x 39
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

28. *Fisher Girl*
Oil, 24 x 20
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

29. *Portrait of Mr Vernon Wethered*
Oil, 30 x 25
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

30. *The Mandolin Player*
Oil, 30 x 25
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

31. *Girl in a Blue Dress*
Oil, 30 x 25
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

32. *Sea Piece*
Oil, 24½ x 35½
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

33. *Seascape*
Oil, 21½ x 29⅜
LENT BY F. R. G. DUCKWORTH, ESQ.

34. *Musical Interlude*
Oil, 20 x 24
LENT BY LEEDS CITY ART GALLERY

35. *Flower Piece*
Oil, 34½ x 24½
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

Water-colours and Drawings

36. *The Bathers*, c. 1910–12
Water-colour, 26½ x 42¾
LENT BY THE TATE GALLERY

37. *The Little Mermaid*, 1920–30
Pencil and wash, 15 x 12
LENT BY MISS GRACE ENGLISH

38. *Nude Drawing: Dancing Female Figure*, 1920–30
Pencil and wash, 16 x 12½
LENT BY MISS GRACE ENGLISH

39. *Nude Drawing: Kneeling Female Figure*, 1920–30
Pencil, 11 x 13½
LENT BY MISS GRACE ENGLISH

40. *The Bathing Pool*, 1923
Water-colour, 26⅝ x 35
LENT BY MRS E. M. DOUGLAS

41. *The Picnic*, 1923
Water-colour, 27½ x 43½
LENT BY MRS E. M. DOUGLAS

42. *Spring* or *The Seasons*, 1927
Water-colour on silk, 31 x 27
LENT BY THE WETHERED FAMILY

43. *Female Nude Reclining on a Sofa*, 1929
Water-colour, 8½ x 12¾
LENT BY THE WETHERED FAMILY

44. *Two Figures, Study for Nausicaa*
Pencil and water-colour, 15¼ x 9
LENT BY THE TATE GALLERY

45. *Seated Negress*
Pencil, 15¾ x 12¼
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

46. *Meri Adams*
Drawing, 11½ x 12
LENT BY THE BRIGHTON ART GALLERY

47. *Standing Female Nude*
Pencil, 13 x 9½
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

48. *Walking Female Nude*
Pencil, 16 x 12
LENT BY THE EXECUTORS OF THE LATE DAME ETHEL WALKER, A.R.A.

49. *Meri Adams*
Pencil and wash, 11¼ x 6
LENT BY EDWARD LE BAS, ESQ., A.R.A.

50. *Standing Male Nude*
Pencil, 13 x 9½
LENT BY EDWARD LE BAS, ESQ., A.R.A.

51. *The Letter*
Water-colour, 13½ x 8¼
LENT BY MISS K. COOPER

52. *Kneeling Female Figure*
Pencil and wash, 9¾ x 12¾
LENT BY MRS E. M. DOUGLAS

53. *Standing Male and Female Nudes*
Pencil and wash, 15¼ x 9⅞
LENT BY MRS E. M. DOUGLAS

54. *Nude*
Pencil and wash, 13 x 8
LENT BY MISS DOROTHY PEACH

55. *Three Draped Women*
Drawing, 13¾ x 9⅜
LENT BY THE WETHERED FAMILY

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